

443 noodles. Their prices were higher than in Minburi or Bangkok, but their service was such a convenience that many people rarely went to town. Some adults in Bang Chan had never been to Bangkok though almost all had visited Minburi, about 3 [43] miles from the temple. Venders often extended credit, and also accepted items such as fresh fish, fruit, and eggs on a barter basis, thus providing an outlet for small amounts of home products. When the subsidiary canals were dry, however, venders could not get to some parts of the village.

Home Sites and Houses

General Arrangement

361 Since the canals provided the chief means of local
• 487 transportation for much of the year, and also supplied water for many household uses, houses were built near the canal, usually within sight of a neighbor's. Home sites were mounded up to a level of two or three feet above that of the fields, but even so, water might cover the mound at the peak of the rainy season. Old wooden houses were set in a grove of bamboo, bananas and other fruit trees and vines, occasionally betel and coconut palms. Nearby might be a shed for 343 the water buffalo which were the draught animals used in farming. Rarely one saw a walled privy.¹ On the same mound might be a cottage built by parents for married children or by an affluent farmer for a hired hand. In this case, the threshing floor, firewood from trees on the mound, and area 342 for kitchen garden would be shared. Many houses were built on stilts to avoid flooding when the water level was high. If the house was elevated sufficiently, the area underneath provided a relatively cool shelter during the hot season for the buffalo, and even for family members for some of their daytime activities.

Depending on the resources of the family, houses were built of either thatch or wood, roofed with thatch, galvanized iron or occasionally, tile. Split bamboo or matting 352 might be used for dividing walls if the house had more than one room. Wooden flooring was usual, but in simpler thatched houses with dirt floors, the buffalo might be sheltered under the same roof with the family. In such a house, one or more low wooden platforms were built for sitting and sleeping. Wide cracks between floor boards conveniently permitted betel 364 chewers to spit without the need for a spittoon. Those who 264 were preparing food or clearing up after a meal could also thus discard refuse or dispose of leftover food that was to 364 be given to chickens, without leaving the kitchen. Some

1. cf. Hauck, 1956, p. 45-6 for description of latrine facilities.

[P. 14]

I

The Village of Bang Chan

Geographical and Cultural Setting

T

133 The heartland of Siam is the Meznaam or Caw Phrajaa Valley, a vast
361 alluvial plain stretching out for some 250 miles north of the Gulf of
161 Thailand and the capital city of Bangkok, where approximately 40 percent
137 of the nation's 26.3 million persons (1960) live.¹ This Central region is
563 distinguished geographically, and to a lesser extent culturally, from the
three other major areas of Thailand: the North, a forested mountain area
dominated by Chiangmai, Thailand's second largest city, and in whose
outer reaches live many of the tribal peoples of Siam; the Northeast, a
broad plateau region which is the largest and economically poorest area of
the country; and the South, or Peninsular Thailand, a jungle and moun-
tain area where the heaviest concentration of Thai Malay-Moslems live.

C

13 The community of Bang Chan is located some 31 kilometers northeast
of Bangkok on what is essentially a flat, seemingly endless rice field, broken
• 487 occasionally by tall Asiatic pines, strings of houses along canals, or clumps
361 of trees shielding some isolated homesteads. A person seeing Bang Chan for
[491] the first time is struck particularly by the intense green of the landscape
and, once off the macadam road that connects the village to Bangkok and to
the market town of Minburi four kilometers to the east, the stillness of the
setting, even along the thickly populated main canal where voices are
muffled by the heavy foliage surrounding each house. Often in the early
hours of the afternoon the only sound that one can hear in Bang Chan is
the dip of the paddles of boats moving up the canal or the barking of
dogs.

T

[114] ¹ There is no general agreement on the precise boundaries of the Meznaam Valley. Zimmerman (1931), Andrews (1935), Blanchard *et al.* (1958), and most Thai government documents use the term synonymously with "Central region," which would include the provinces east and southeast of Bangkok to the Cambodia frontier, west to the Burma border, and north of the Gulf of Thailand. Credner (1935) and deYoung (1935) on the other hand limit the term to only that portion of the Central region which falls north of Bangkok, equivalent to what Pendleton (1962) calls the "Bangkok Plain." Our population figure refers to the former usage.

BANG CHAN

FOREWORD

114 The Cornell Thailand Project, like other Cornell University studies in community development, is a long term investigation in the field of the processes involved in changing cultural behavior in a non-industrialized society. Field research was begun in 1948 in the central plain of Thailand with base line studies of the rice farming community of Bang Chan and its environs. A collaborating staff of Thai and Americans representing different disciplines has continued to work in Thailand at Bang Chan and elsewhere in a series of phases extending to the present.

[413] The first interim report issued by the Project gives a general account of the economic, political and social organization of Bang Chan in 1948-49 together with some material on health and diet (Sharp et al., 1953). Since the circulation [428] of this first interim report was limited, some of the salient characteristics of Bang Chan should be outlined here.

361 Bang Chan is located some twenty roadmiles northeast of Bangkok, the rapidly growing major metropolis and capital of Thailand. The village is between two and three miles west of a small district administrative center and market town, Minburi. A century-old canal and to the north of it a post-war hard surface road connect Minburi and Bangkok so that [437] villagers have easy access to these two centers by boat or [441] bus.

621 In 1954, when data for the present study were still being gathered, the population of Bang Chan was about 1700, divided [62] among about 300 households. Roughly 60 per cent of the households were made up of independent nuclear families consisting [592] of parents and unmarried children. The average size for all families was 5.7 persons. Rice farming was the main occupation of 80 per cent of all families. The population in 1954 [243] worked and lived on about 2800 acres (7000 rai) of land. With the exception of some 120 acres (300 rai) used for the home [241] sites and home gardens scattered along the network of canals [463] in the village, all land was devoted to the cultivation of wet [311] rice. Nutritional density is thus practically the same as population density. Of the rice crop, 60 per cent or more may be sold, the remainder providing seed, feed, and the staple food of the people. During the wet season and into the cooler [432] dry season, from May or June to February, the growing of the [221] single crop of rice is the main activity. The hot dry season [517] from March until the rice planting begins again is a period of fiestas, ceremonies, and visiting.

621 The Thai countryside is divided into hamlets, each with a headman in charge of the thirty to sixty households of the [622] hamlet. Seven such hamlets constitute the Bang Chan community. [128] (In the Project studies they are identified by the initials BC and KY followed by a number).